

A woman's way

Empowering woman to take to the sea

By Andria Farrell
ANFARRELL@CNC.COM

The fifth annual Woman Underway seminar at the Duxbury Bay Maritime School took place June 1 with a lot of firsts. It was the first year it was run entirely by women, and "the first time in five years it's not raining," DBMS Development Director Anne Mullins said.

"This is the fifth annual Woman Underway seminar, and the first year it is being run by all women - it is the best year yet because of that," Duxbury Bay Maritime School Executive Director Ned Lawson said as he introduced the seminar.

The half-day seminar introduced more than 50 women to the basics of sailing, driving a powerboat, boating safety, rowing, knot know-how, and the mechanics of a boat. Split into groups, the women got a taste of what the sea has to offer, and of the many ways to learn them at DBMS. Mullins said the concept is to have women teaching women how to drive a powerboat, talk boating safety, and become responsible, capable boaters.

"We are empowering women to take the helm and take responsibility and enjoy themselves on Duxbury Bay as capable boaters," she said.

Duxbury has a historic background of women on the sea, Lawson said. Duxbury was originally a sailing and ship-building town, and wives of sailors would accompany their husbands out to sea for months at a time where they were responsible for sewing, cooking and cleaning on the vessel. In the 1950s, when Duxbury became a summer community, women began to enjoy sailing on the open water. "Sailing was the first sport to open up to women," Lawson added.

Gale Willauer has been boating for 14 years. She said one of the most important things to know about boating safety is the times of the tide, the layout of the channels and the depths of the water. Duxbury Bay is shallow, with certain areas impassible even at half tide. It is common for boaters to get stuck in the mud and, shallow waters at some point, that is why one of her second most important lessons of boating was, "Always carry a good book with you, incase you get stuck and need to waste some time."

"Driving a boat is like driving a car on a moving surface," Willauer said.

Although the analogy sounded simple, most of the students agreed that the moving part was the problem. In fact many of them learned that lesson first

hand as they learned how to dock a powerboat. It was a perfect day for sailing with a light breeze and blue skies, however, as a first timer learning to dock a boat, the light breeze made it a little more challenging. Every time the boat was in position to dock, the wind would kick up just enough to turn the boat and create an impossible docking experience. The best lesson learned was if going slow, even if the boat hits the dock, it won't get hurt.

As an introduction to the seminar, the women divided into three groups and went out for jaunt on the Bay to learn about the rules of the water and the points of the channel. The channel, marked by red and green buoys, is a pathway of deep water for safe exit and entry into the harbor. When leaving the harbor, the green buoys should always be on the right and the red on the left, and vice versa on the way back into the harbor, Willauer said.

Many of the women at the seminar had already driven a power-

boat, sailed a boat, or owned a boat and just wanted to learn some technical skills. Caryn Donnelly said she signed up for the seminar because her husband "was re-bitten by the sailing bug," and was looking to purchase a boat. "If we get a boat, I want to know how to use it," she said.

Guest speaker Maureen McKinnon-Tucker told her female audience that it was important for them to know how to use a boat, especially if they owned one - that way they could go

out whenever they wanted and not just when their spouses could.

McKinnon-Tucker is a Paralympics hopeful for the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing, China. As a paraplegic, McKinnon-Tucker sails a SKUD 18 sailboat that is designed to handle her disability, as well as her Paralympics partner, Nick Scandone, who has ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

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Gale Willauer demonstrates the proper use of an anchor at the Woman Under Way Seminar at DBMS, June 1.

McKinnon-Tucker was the first woman to ever make the disabled sailing team, and she has made it five times since then. The mother of two has been sailing since she was in her 20s, briefly turning away from the sport after the accident that left her legs paralyzed almost 12 years ago. After learning about the use of the SKUD boats for sailing in the Paralympics she was turned back on.

She spoke not only about her quest for the Paralympics, but also about the need for women to take charge and get more involved in sail racing or any boating sport. She said between marriage and children the role for women in sailing is often lost, but she is living, breathing, proof that sailing can be done by anyone. As a mother of two young children – a 7-year-old and a 1-year-old – if she can accomplish all she has, then anyone can get out there and sail.

"If I can sail as a paraplegic and race and continue to be on the circuit and sail the way I do, I don't see any reason why woman who are interested can't sail here locally," McKinnon Tucker said.

For more information on any of the classes offered at DBMS visit www.duxbayms.com.



Nancy Palmeri learns how to dock a powerboat, as instructor Emily Pelo walks her through the steps.



Tracy Shortt eases her way toward a dock, while instructor Emily Pelo talks her through the motions and Nancy Palmeri enjoys the sunny seminar day.